



# Forming and Maintaining Communities of Practice in Online Professional Development

**UNT**<sup>®</sup>  
UNIVERSITY  
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**EST. 1890**

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Center for Learning Experimentation,  
Application, & Research

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# Outline



- Introduce
- Context
- Community of Practice (CoP)
  - What is a community of practice?
  - Why a community of practice?
  - How do we form Communities of practice in online spaces?
- Challenges

# University of North Texas



- Our School

- Denton, TX
- public R1 University
- award undergraduate, graduate (Master's and doctoral), and professional degrees

- Our Students

- 38,081 total students served
- 94% enrolled full-time
- 22 average age of undergraduate student; 32 for graduate students
- minority serving institution
- majority of students live in DFW and commute to campus (~80%)\*
- 41.3% first-generation college students
- receive Pell grants (37%)\*\*
- 37% UG enrolled in *some* distance education/9% graduates\*
- 4% undergraduates enrolled in *only* distance education/33% graduates\*

\*according to [NCES 2016-2017](#)

\*\*full-time undergraduates according to Common Data Set

Note: Data pulled from [UNT 2017-2018 Fact Book](#) with the exception of the above.

# University of North Texas



- Our Faculty

- 3,015 total faculty\*
- Full-time: 37%
- Adjunct: 20%
- Graduate student teachers: 43%
- 24:1 student to faculty ratio
- Median undergraduate class size: 26

\*includes administrators who hold faculty appointments

Note: Data pulled from [UNT 2017-2018 Fact Book](#); percentages rounded up



CENTER FOR LEARNING  
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APPLICATION, AND RESEARCH

- Services:
  - Instructional Design
  - LMS Support
  - Marketing
  - Production
  - Videoconferencing
  - Faculty Development



# Hello There ...

Name

Institution

Position

Communities/Groups

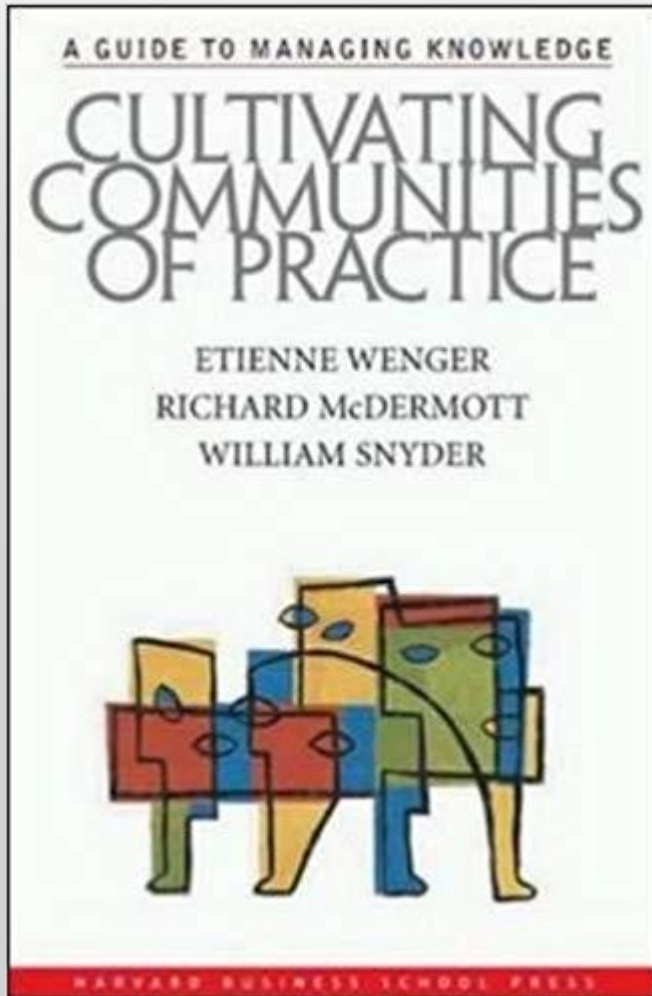


Image of book cover for *Cultivating Communities of Practice*

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W.M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press

# What are CoPs?

- Practice!
- Looser structure, more informal, and non-hierarchical
- Have core members and occasional participants
- Membership is self-selective and voluntary
- Emerge naturally (but can be created with careful design)



# Elements of CoPs

- Domain – area of focus
  - student learning in higher ed
  - assessment, engaged learning, teaching with technology
  - problem-solving groups or helping communities
  - Best practice communities
  - Innovation communities
- Community – people who value this area and what they value about it may differ, but the point is they value the area (instructors, students, staff, administrators)
- Practice – people in the community are in it to develop skills in the domain (teaching)

# What CoPs are you involved with?

What communities/ groups are you currently involved with?	Which elements (domain, community, and practice) of a CoP are included in your group?	Would you consider your group to be a CoP? If not, how could you make your group a CoP?

# Why a CoP in Higher Ed?

- Not top down
- Variety of course types, class sizes, and student demographics mean lots of variables in teaching so things like “best practices” are context-specific.
- Therefore, in order to generate knowledge, practitioners need to be able to share, analyze, and evaluate together to form new knowledge and practices

# Designing CoPs

- “Fewer elements in the beginning” (53)
- Community coordinator
- Initially:
  - “defining the CoP’s focus
  - identifying and building relationships between members
  - identifying topics and projects that would be exciting for community members” (73)
- Establish a rhythm

# Designing Online CoPs Activity

## Part 1: Individual Responses

1. Refer to the question assigned to your group.
2. Spend a few minutes **reflecting** on the question and **writing responses** on the post-it notes provided.
3. Place each post-it note onto the large post-it poster.

# Designing Online CoPs Activity

## Part 2: Discussion & Compilation

1. **Review** the post-it notes.
2. Spend a few minutes **discussing** common themes and points of disagreement/clarifications.
3. **Share** responses with larger group.

Why and/or how could  
you implement an online  
CoP at your institution?



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# Thank You

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